

Williamson landfill finds ways to avoid expansion

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(Photo: Jamie Page / The Tennessean)

While most waste dumps throughout the country continue to expand, the Williamson County Landfill is about to decrease its waste footprint and become more sustainable in an effort to avoid future expansions.

The facility, off Pinewood Road near Leiper's Fork, has received a permit from the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation to allow it to shrink its active 50-acre Class III dump site by more than 10 percent, to 44 acres, and prepare for a groundbreaking environmental project.

The landfill no longer accepts regular household waste, but now takes only landscaping debris, brush, farm waste and construction/demolition debris. Williamson's household waste is trucked about 75 miles to a landfill in Camden, Tenn.

The new permit will free up access to about 6 acres where old garbage has been buried. The next move would be to replace an underground bioreactor.

In 2000, the landfill became the first in the world to install a series of underground piping that uses leachate liquid from decomposed garbage and injected air to speed up the breakdown of trash.

Kevin Wolfe, an environmental engineer with Civil and Environmental Consultants, which is helping the county department plan the project, says the bioreactor cell will be mined for recyclables, the compost used for ground cover at the landfill and new bioreactor cells will be installed on the same footprint.

Beyond the added operational costs, the project could create a net savings of \$750,000 to \$1 million a year in annual tipping fees and associated costs, according to Nancy Zion, the county's solid waste director.

The excavation process would be repeated every few months, turning the majority of the garbage into compost, allowing the landfill to continue accepting new waste without expanding its landfill footprint.

"We are hoping that space in the landfill will be sustainable, never-ending, because we will reuse it," Zion said. "My goal is to redefine the way solid waste is handled going forward and to be an example to others."

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